

Syndicalists in the Russian Revolution

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“Discussing the activities and role of the Anarchists in the Revolution, Kropotkin said: ‘We Anarchists have talked much of revolutions, but few of us have been prepared for the actual work ,to be done during, the process. I have indicated some things in this relation in my Conquest of Bread. Pouget and Pataud have also sketched a line of action in their work on Syndicalism and the Co-operative Commonwealth.

Kropotkin thought that the Anarchists had not given sufficient to the fundamental elements of the social revolution. The real facts in a revolutionary process do not consist so much in actual fighting — that is, merely the destructive phase necessary to clear the way for constructive effort. The basic factor in a revolution is the organisation of the economic life of the country. The Russian Revolution had proved conclusively that we must prepare thoroughly for that. Everything else is of minor importance. He had come to think that, Syndicalism was likely to furnish what Russia most lacked: the channel through which the industrial and economic reconstruction of the country may flow. He referred to Anarcho-Syndialism. That and the co-operatives would save other countries some of the blunders and suffering Russia was going through.”

EMMA GOLDMAN, ‘My Disillusionment in Russia’,
on a visit to Peter Kropotkin at Dimitrov, July 1920.

The Revolution shook all classes and strata of Russian social life. A vast unrest had permeated all levels of Russian society as a result of three centuries of oppression by the Tsarist regime.

During the revolutionary explosion, this unrest became the force which cemented the heterogeneous elements into a powerful united front, and which annihilated the edifice of despotism within three days, a brief revolutionary period, unprecedented in history. Within this movement, despite the fact that its component forces were actuated by different, and often mutually exclusive tasks and purposes, reigned full unanimity. At the moment of revolutionary explosion the aims of those various forces happened to coincide, since they were negative in character, being directed at annihilating the superannuated absolutist regime. The constructive aims were not yet clear. It was only during the further course of development, through the differing constructions placed on the aims and tasks of the revolution, that the hitherto amorphous forces began to crystallise and a struggle arose among them for the triumph of their ideas and objectives.

It is a noteworthy feature of the revolution that despite the rather small influence of Anarchists on the masses before its out break, it followed from its inception the anarchistic course of full decentralisation; the revolutionary bodies immediately pushed to the front by the course of revolution were Anarcho-Syndicalist in their essential character. These were of the kind which lend themselves as adequate instruments for the quickest realisation of the Anarchist ideal — Soviets, Factory Committees, peasant land committees and house committees, etc. The inner logic of the development and growth of such organisations led in November (October) 1917 to the temporary extinction of the State and the sweeping away of the foundations of capitalist economy. I say temporarily, for in the long run the State and capitalism came to triumph, the logical development of the revolution having been openly frustrated by those who at first were instrumental in accelerating its course of development. Unchecked by the too trustful masses, whose aims and course

of action, though felt instinctively, were still far from being clearly realised, the Bolsheviks, to the extent that they gained the confidence of those masses, gradually enveloped the revolution with the chilling atmosphere of State dominance and brute force, thus dooming it to an inevitable process of decay. This process, however, became noticeable only six months after the “October revolution”. Up to that moment the revolution kept on ripening. The struggle became sharper and the objectives began to assume an ever clearer and more outspoken character. The country seethed and bubbled over, living a full life under conditions of freedom.

Grand struggle

The struggle of classes, groups and parties for preponderant influence in the revolution was intense, powerful and striking in character. As a result of this struggle there resulted a sort of stalemate of forces; none was in a position to command superiority in relation to the rest. This in turn made it impossible for the State and government — the external force standing above society — to become the instrument of one of the contending forces. The State, therefore, was paralysed, not being able to exert its negative influence on the course of events, the more so in that the army, due to its active part in the movement, ceased to be an obedient instrument of State power. In this grand struggle of interests and ideas the Anarchists took an active and lively part.

The period from March (February) to November (October) 1917 was in its sweep and scope a most resplendent one for Anarcho-Syndicalist and Anarchist work, that is for propaganda, agitation, organisation and action.

The revolution opened wide the door to Anarchist emigres returning from various countries, where they had fled to escape the ferocious persecution of the Tsar's government. But even before the emigres' return there arose, with the active participation of comrades released from prison and exile, groups and unions of Anarchists, as well as Anarchist publications. With the return of the Anarchists from abroad, this work began to pick up considerable momentum. Russia was covered with a thick, albeit too loosely connected, net of groups. Scarcely a sizeable city did not have an Anarcho-Syndicalist or Anarchist group. The propaganda took dimensions unprecedented for Anarchist activity in Russia. Proportionately, there was a great number of Anarchist newspapers, magazines, leaflets, pamphlets and books. The book market was flooded with Anarchist literature. The interest in Anarcho-Syndicalism and Anarchism was enormous, reaching even the remote corners of the faraway North.

Newspapers were published not only in the large administrative and industrial centres, like Moscow and Petrograd, which had several Anarchist newspapers (in Petrograd the circulation of the Anarcho-Syndicalist *Golos Trouda* and the Anarchist *Burevestnik* was 25,000 each; the Moscow daily *Anarchia* had about the same circulation), but also in provincial cities, like Kronstadt, Yaroslavl, Nizhni-Novgorod, Saratov, Samara, Krasnoyarsk, Vladivostok, Rostov on Don, Odessa and Kiev. (In 1918, Anarchist papers were coming out in Ivanovo-Vosnesensk, Chembar, Ekaterinburg, Kursk, Ekaterinoslav, Viatka.)

Oral propaganda was even more extensive than written — it was carried out in the army, as well as in factories and villages. The propaganda stressed the central task of bringing out and carrying to their logical end the Anarchist principles and tendencies inherent in the revolution. This propaganda, Anarcho-Syndicalist propaganda especially, was very successful with the toilers. The influence of Anarchism, especially its Anarcho-Syndicalist variety, was so great with the Petrograd workers that the Social-Democrats were compelled to issue a special publication for the purpose of waging a struggle against "Anarcho-Syndicalism among the organised proletariat." Unfortunately, this influence was not organised.

‘Centralism via federalism’

The influence of Anarcho-Syndicalism showed itself creditably in the struggle for supremacy waged by the Factory Committees against the trade unions. The Factory Committees were almost completely swayed by a unique sort of Anarcho-Syndicalism; this is attested by all the conferences of the Petrograd Factory Committees, and by the All-Russian conferences of these committees. Moreover, the Bolsheviks in their drive towards seizure of power and dictatorship, were forced to cast away (for the time being only, as subsequent events proved), their orthodox Marxism and to accept Anarchist slogans and methods. Alas, this was but a tactical move on their part, not a genuine change of programme. The slogans formulated by the Bolsheviks (Communists) voiced, in a precise and intelligible manner, the demands of the masses in revolt, coinciding with the slogans of the Anarchists: “Down with the war,” “Immediate peace without annexations or indemnities, over the heads of the governments and capitalists,” “Abolition of the army,” “Arming of the workers,” “Immediate seizure of land by the peasants,” “Seizure of factories by the workers,” “A Federation of Soviets,” etc. Wouldn’t the realisation of these great slogans lead to the full triumph of Anarchist ideology, to the sweeping away of the basis and foundations of Marxism? Wasn’t it natural for the Anarchists to be taken in by these slogans, considering that they lacked a strong organisation to carry them out independently? Consequently, they continued taking part in the joint struggle.

But reality soon proved that all the lapses by the Bolsheviks from the revolutionary position were no casual things, but moves in a rigorously thought-out tactical plan, directed against the vital interests and demands of the masses — a plan designed to carry out in life the dead dogmas of a disintegrated Marxism. The true face of the Bolsheviks was revealed by the Commissar of National Affairs-Stalin (Dzhugashvili), who in one of his articles (April 1918) wrote that their aim is, “To arrive at centralism via federalism.” Persistently, cautiously, the revolution was being forced into Marxist channels in accordance with a preconceived plan. Such a channel is for every popular creed a Procrustean bed.

Thus, during the period of the Bourgeois and Bourgeois Socialist Government, the Anarchists worked (not organisationally of course) hand-in-hand with the Bolsheviks. How were the Anarchists situated during that period? The listing of the cities where Anarchist publications came out shows that freedom of the press was of the most extensive kind. Not a single newspaper was closed, not a single leaflet, pamphlet or book confiscated, not a single rally or mass meeting forbidden. Despite the seizure of rich private houses, like the Durnovo Villa and other mansions in Petrograd; despite the seizure of printing shops, including the printing shop of *Russkaya Volia*, published by the Tsar’s minister Protopopov; despite open incitement to insubordination and appeals for soldiers to leave the fronts; despite all that, only a few cases where Anarchists were manhandled might be construed as connivance by authorities, or premeditated acts. True, the government, at that period, was not averse to dealing severely with both Anarchists and Bolsheviks. Kerensky threatened many times to “burn them out with red-hot irons”. But the government was powerless, because the revolution was in full swing.

After October

How did the position of the Anarchists change with the triumph of the October revolution, in the preparation and making of which they had taken such a prominent part? It has to be pointed out that during the Kerensky period the Anarchists had grown considerably and that towards the October days their movement had already assumed considerable proportions. This growth became even more accelerated after the October revolution, when the Anarchists took an active part in the direct struggle against both the counter-revolution and the German-Austrian troops. Not only did the voice of the Anarchists command attention, but the masses actually followed the appeals and directives of the Anarchists, having come to see in them the concrete formulation of their age-long aspirations. That is why they backed demands of an Anarcho-Syndicalist character, carrying them out in the teeth of hamstringing efforts, rather feeble at that time, by the Bolsheviks.

Under the influence of Anarcho-Syndicalist propaganda, there began in Petrograd a spontaneous process of socialisation of housing by the house committees. This extended to entire streets, bringing into existence street committees and block committees, when entire blocks were drawn in. It spread to other cities. In Kronstadt it started even earlier than Petrograd and reached even greater intensity. If in Petrograd and other cities, dwellings were socialised only on the triumph of the October revolution, in Kronstadt similar steps were taken earlier, under the influence of Yartchuk, who was enjoying great popularity in that town, and in face of the active resistance of the Bolsheviks. Measures of this kind were carried out in an organised way by the revolutionary workers and sailors throughout the town. The Bolshevik fraction left a session of the Kronstadt Soviet in protest against the socialisation of dwellings.

Workers' Control

In the field of revolutionary struggle towards immediate abolition of the institution of private property in the means of production, the influence of the Anarchists was even more pronounced. The idea of “workers’ control”, carried out through the Factory Committees, an idea advocated by the Anarcho-Syndicalists from the very outset of the revolution, took root among the city workers, gaining such a strong hold on them as to force its acceptance, in a distorted form, of course, by the Socialist parties. The Social Democrats and the right Social-Revolutionists twisted this idea of workers’ control into that of State control over industry, with the participation of workers, leaving enterprises in the hands of the capitalists.

As for the Bolsheviks, they were quite vague about the meaning of the term “workers’ control”, leaving it undefined, and making it a handy tool of demagogic propaganda. This is confirmed by A. Lozovsky (S. A. Dridzo), who writes the following in his pamphlet *Workers’ Control* (Petersburg, the Socialist Publishing House, 1918):

“Workers’ control was the fighting slogan of the Bolsheviks before the October days ... but despite the fact that workers’ control figured in all resolutions, and was displayed on all banners, it had an aura of mystery about it. The party Press wrote very little about this slogan, still less did it try to implement it in a concrete way. When the October revolution broke out and it became necessary to say clearly and precisely what this workers’ control was, it developed that, even among the partisans of this slogan, there existed great differences of opinion on that’ score.” (p. 19.)

The Bolsheviks refused to accept the Anarcho-Syndicalist construction of the idea of workers’ control; namely, taking control of production, its socialisation and instituting workers’ control over socialised production through the Factory Committees. This idea won out, workers having begun expropriating enterprises while the Bourgeois-Socialist government was still in power. The Factory Committees and various control committees were already taking over the managing functions at that time. On the eve of the October revolution this movement assumed a truly mass character.

Factory Committees

The Factory Committees and their Central Bureau became the foundation of the new revolutionary movement, which set itself the task of making the factories into Producer and Consumer Communes. The Factory Committees were to become the nuclei of the new social order gradually emerging from the inchoate elemental life of the revolution. Anarchistic in their essence, the Factory Committees made many enemies. The attitude of all political parties was restrained hostility, their efforts centering on reducing the Factory Committees to a subordinate position within the trade unions. The Communists from the outset showed their suspicion of this type of organisation. It was only after they had become convinced that the trade unions were too strongly dominated by the Social-Democrats to lend themselves as instruments of Communist policy that, following the Anarcho-Syndicalists, they began to centre their attention on the Factory Committees, aiming to place them under their control and, through those committees, ultimately to gain control of the trade unions. Despite this attitude, the Bolsheviks were forced by the course of events to assume a position toward the Factory Committees which differed little from that of the Anarcho-Syndicalists. Only gradually did they assume this position. At first they combatted it.

“The Anarcho-Syndicalists entrenched themselves behind the Factory Committees. They created a veritable theory around it, saying in effect that the trade unions have died, that the future belongs to the Factory Committees, who will deliver the knock-out blow to capitalism, that the Factory Committees are the highest form of labour movement, etc. In a word, they developed in regard to the Factory Committees the same theory which the French Anarcho-Syndicalists developed in regard to the trade unions. Under these conditions the divorce between the two organisations (trade unions and Factory Committees) represents the greatest danger for the labour movement of Russia.

“This danger is the greater, that even among active people of the Factory Committees who are not Anarcho-Syndicalists, we also see this tendency to oppose the trade unions to the Factory Committees and even to replace industrial unions and their local branches with respective organisations of the Factory Committee type.” — Lozovsky, *Workers' Control* (p. 37).

Seizure of enterprises

Characteristically, only the Anarcho-Syndicalist press correctly evaluated the role and significance of the Factory Committees. The first article in the revolutionary press on this problem, by the author of these lines, appeared in the first issue of *Golos Trouda*. (Incidentally, the article did not express the opinion of *Golos Trouda* as a whole on this problem.) At one of the conferences of the Factory Committees held in Petrograd, during August, 1917, the article was hotly contested by the Bolsheviks, notably Lozovsky and others. But this idea, sound in itself and answering the mood and needs of the workers, became dominant even in the Bolshevik Party. Even Lenin declared in his speech at the All-Russian Trade Union Convention (held in the spring of 1918) that “the factory is a self-governing commune of producers and consumers.”

The results of this Anarcho-Syndicalist propaganda soon bore fruit. There followed a wave of seizures of enterprises and the organisation of Workers' Management. These began when the provisional government was still in power and, it stands to reason, the Anarchists played the foremost role in them. The most talked-of event of the kind at that period was the expropriation under the direct influence of the Anarchist Zhuk, of the Shlisselburg gunpowder mills and agricultural estates, both of which were then organised on Anarchist principles. Such events recurred ever more frequently, and on the eve of the October revolution they came to be regarded as a matter of course. Soon after the triumph of the October revolution, the Central Bureau of the Factory Committees worked out extensive instructions for the control of production. These instructions proved to be a brilliant literary document, showing the triumph of the Anarcho-Syndicalist idea. The significance of this incident is the greater considering that the Bolsheviks were then predominant in the Factory Committees.

How greatly the workers were influenced by the idea of Factory Committees being the executive bodies of the Factory-Communes — the cellular bodies joining into a federative organisation, which unites all workers and creates the necessary industrial administrative system — is shown by the uneasiness the Bolsheviks revealed after the October revolution.

“In place of a ‘Republic of Soviets’, we are led to a republic of producers’ co-operatives (artels), into which the capitalist factories would be metamorphosed by this process. Instead of a rapid regulation of the social production and consumption — instead of measures which, objected to as they may be on various grounds, do represent a genuine step toward a socialist organisation of society — instead of that we are witnessing something which partakes somewhat of the Anarchist visionary dreams about autonomous industrial communes.” — I. Stepanov, *From Workers' Control towards Workers' Administration in the industries and Agriculture* (Moscow, 1918, p. 11).

The predominance of the Bolsheviks makes even more remarkable the successes achieved by our comrades, especially that of W. Shatov, in their work carried on within the Factory Committees. (Shatov led the attack on the Winter Palace, Petrograd, in October 1917. He left the Anarcho-Syndicalist movement and became in fact a Bolshevik from the very moment when the capital was moved to Moscow early in 1918. He was arrested and probably shot without

trial during the purges in the late 1930s.) Even though dominated by the Bolsheviks, the Factory Committees of that period were carrying out the Anarchist idea. The latter, of course, suffered in clarity and purity when carried out by the Bolsheviks within the Factory Committees; had the Anarchists been in the majority they would have tried to eliminate completely from the work of the committees the element of centralisation and State principles.

Spontaneous Syndicalism

We are not out here to give a detailed history of the Russian trade union movement, or a chronicle of the struggle of various political parties and groups within the trade unions. Ours is a purely informatory task. We want to stress those moments in the life of the trade union movement highlighted by the work of the Anarcho-Syndicalist minority. The labour movement, like the revolution itself, arose spontaneously. It set aside trade unions, basing itself mainly on the Factory Committees and their associations, especially in Petrograd.

Although the Russian proletariat was, as a whole, entirely ignorant of the ideas of Revolutionary Syndicalism, and despite the scarcity of Anarcho Syndicalist literature, as well as an almost total lack of representatives of this movement among the Russian workers; despite all that, the labour movement of all Russia went along the road of decentralisation. It chose spontaneously the course of a unique Revolutionary Syndicalism. Unlike other periods, the one following the February revolution of 1917 was characterised by the active participation of Anarcho-Syndicalists — workers who had returned to Russia from the United States, where they had taken part in the struggles of the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW).

Factory Committees v trade unions

Until January 1918, that is until the First All-Russian Trade Union Convention, the labour movement sailed under the banners of the Factory Committees. These waged a fierce struggle against the bourgeois elements that fought silently for supremacy, as against the trade unions. This struggle assumed an especially strong character after the Third All-Russian Trade Union Conference, which clearly revealed the gulf between the tactics and aims of the trade unions and those of the Factory Committees. The latter, united first in Petrograd, then throughout Russia, singled out their own central bodies and gave the keystone to the course of the revolution. The Anarcho-Syndicalists took an active part in both the Factory Committees and the trade unions. There was no unanimity in Anarcho-Syndicalist ranks about which of the two organisations should be preferred. The movement headed by the author of these lines was far from being supported by the rest of the Anarchists. It was not even accepted by the group publishing *Golos Trouda*. Likewise, many Bolsheviks were averse to the viewpoint favouring the Factory Committees as against the trade unions. At one of the conferences of the Petrograd Factory Committees, Lozovsky subjected this view, and the movement backing it, to a cruel and unscrupulous attack.

On the whole, however, the Anarcho-Syndicalist elements showed a preference for the Factory Committees, having concentrated their forces in that direction. They were represented in many individual Factory Committees, as well as in the Petrograd Bureau and the All-Russian Central Bureau of Factory Committees. Likewise the influence exercised by the Anarcho-Syndicalists on the work of the conferences of the Factory Committees, whose paper, *Novy Put*, was strongly coloured with a unique kind of Anarcho-Syndicalism, though no Anarcho-Syndicalists were on its staff.

In view of this direct and indirect influence of Anarcho-Syndicalists, the bourgeois and socialist papers began to voice alarm: the newspapers *Dien* (bourgeois), *Novaya Zhizn* (socialist), *Izvestia Petrogradskogo Obshtchestva Zavochikovy Fabricantov* (bourgeois), *Izvestia Tzentralnogo Ispolnitelnogo Komiteta* (socialist), *Rabochaya Gazeta* (socialist), etc. The Social-Democrats issued a special publication (*Rabochaya Mysl*) to combat Anarcho-Syndicalist influence among the organised proletariat.

In vain, however. The Anarcho-Syndicalists were conquering the masses with the slogan of "Workers' Control". Ever greater masses of workers were swept under Anarcho-Syndicalist influence, which impelled them to proceed with the seizure of factories. The influence of the Anarcho-Syndicalist slogan "Workers' Control" showed itself in the *Manual for the Carrying Out of Workers' Control of Industry*, edited and published by the Central Council of the Petrograd Factory Committees and which met a sharp rebuff from the Bolsheviks and Mensheviks at the First All-Russian Trade Union Convention. (See *The First All-Russian Convention of Trade Unions*, Stenographic Report. Also A. Lozovsky (Dridzo), *Workers' Control*.)

The Anarcho-Syndicalists at that time had their group organisations outside the unions and were publishing newspapers and magazines. In Petrograd *Golos Trouda*, Kharkov *Rabochaya Mysl*, Krasnoyarsk *Sibirsky Anarchist*, in Moscow a revolutionary Syndicalist organ *Rabochaya*

Zhizn, etc. The Anarcho-Syndicalists were represented in numerous Factory Committees and trade unions, where they were carrying on intensive propaganda. The great majority of Anarcho-Syndicalists believed that, by working within the trade unions, they would succeed in imparting to the latter an Anarcho-Syndicalist direction.

Sweep of movement

Before the First All-Russian Trade Union Convention, the Anarcho-Syndicalists succeeded in organising on the platform of the American IWW between 25 and 30 thousand miners of the Debaltzev district in the Don Basin. The Cossack massacre, which led to the murder of comrade Koniayev, the organiser of this union, and the subsequent civil war, destroyed those beginnings. The same was true of Anarcho-Syndicalist work in the Cheremkhovo mine, before the Czechoslovak rebellion. In Ekaterinodar and throughout Novorossiysk province the labour movement was adopting the Anarcho-Syndicalist platform. This movement was headed by B. Yelensky, Katia Gorbova and others. The movement embraced the entire Chernomorsky province, with the cities Ekaterinodar and Novorossiysk. The main contingents in this movement were portworkers and cement workers. In Moscow the Anarcho-Syndicalists had a dominant influence among the railway workers, perfumery workers and others. (The movement was carried on by comrades including Preferansov, N. K. Lebediev Kritskaya.) To translate this influence into terms of definite numbers is difficult. We can only point out that, at the First All-Russian Trade Union Convention, there was an Anarcho-Syndicalist faction. It included a few Maximalists and other sympathizers totalling twenty-five people. And since the basis of representation was on the average of one delegate per 3,000 3,500 members, one may say that the number of organised Anarcho-Syndicalist workers reached 88,000. This figure, however, might safely be increased two or three times to form an adequate idea of the actual sweep of the movement.

Factory Committees subordinated

At the First Trade Union Convention, immediately after the October revolution, the Bolsheviks and Left Social-Revolutionists were in the majority. It signified the final victory of the trade unions over the Factory Committees. The Bolsheviks subordinated the Factory Committees, which were federalist and anarchistic by nature, to the centralised trade unions. With the help of the trade unions, the Bolsheviks succeeded in making the Factory Committees a tool in their policy of domination over the masses. Having achieved that, the Bolsheviks proceeded to strip the Committees of all their functions. And by this time the Factory Committees fulfilled only one function, the police role imposed on them by the Bolsheviks.

In 1918, the Bolshevik terror still spared the trade unions. And thus we saw the development of an Anarcho-Syndicalist movement in the bakers' union of Moscow, Kharkov and Kiev (very energetic work was carried on among the Kiev bakers by A. Baron, who if not executed by now [1940] is still being kept in prison or exile; ever since 1920, he was switched back and forth from various prisons to places of exile), and among the Petrograd postal and telegraph workers. At the All-Russian Convention of Postal and Telegraph Workers, the Anarcho-Syndicalists exercised a powerful influence, more than half the delegates following their lead. (The principal Anarcho-Syndicalist workers in this union were Milhalev, Bondarev and others. The extent of Anarcho-Syndicalist influence in the union can be judged by reading the stenographic report of the convention held in 1918.) The Petrograd branch of this union marched under the banners of Anarcho-Syndicalism. Its publication, *Izvestia Pochtovo-Telegrainikh Sluzhashtchikk Petrograda* was edited by Anarcho-Syndicalists. The same was true of the Union River Transport Workers of the Volga Basin where, due to the work of comrade Anosov, the union publication took a definite Anarcho-Syndicalist stand.

Capture of trade unions

All that, however, was destroyed by the Bolsheviks. The industrial principle underlying the process of merging unions into large units became a useful weapon in the Bolshevik struggle against Anarcho-Syndicalism. In the first place the Bolsheviks began to consolidate those unions which they deemed unreliable, from the viewpoint of their own basic drive for domination. The move was to merge such unions in the general mass and scatter the leading Anarcho-Syndicalist workers in unions considered “reliable” from their point of view. Thus went down a number of Anarchist-minded trade unions; the union of telegraph workers in Petrograd, of perfumery workers in Moscow, of water transport workers in Kazan, the organisations of some important railroad junctions of Moscow and Kursk, where comrades like Kovalevich and Dvumjantzev played an important role.

Due to this measure and to intensified centralisation, coupled with unscrupulous juggling of votes and, in some places, the severe measures applied by the authorities, the administrative bodies fell into the hands of Communists. The Second All-Russian Convention of Trade Unions (1919) furnishes an apt example of this process of capturing the trade unions. At that convention the number of Anarcho-Syndicalist and sympathetic delegates was only 15. That is, they represented only 52,950, at a moment when the workers’ sympathies for Anarcho-Syndicalism were noticeably on the increase, a fact accentuated by a concurrent lowering of the standing of the Bolsheviks in the eyes of the workers. The standing rules of the convention deprived the Anarcho-Syndicalists of the right to have their own speaker on the important questions on the agenda. At the third convention, in 1920, there were only 10 Anarcho-Syndicalist delegates (including sympathisers) representing only 35,300 people.

Those conventions fully demonstrated the failure of the tactics advocated by Golos Trouda, which carried weight with the Anarcho-Syndicalists of Russia. (The author was on the staff of Golos Trouda, but this does not deter him from acknowledging the errors made by the paper.) The lack of purely revolutionary unions hastened the destruction of the Anarchist and Syndicalist movements. Scattered throughout the Bolshevik unions, the Anarcho-Syndicalist forces could not show any resistance and were flattened by the iron policy of the “Dictatorship of the Proletariat”.

At the beginning of 1920 only one union in Moscow held out for the Anarcho-Syndicalist line. This was the Bakers’ Union, whose Anarcho-Syndicalist orientation was due to the work of our comrade N. I. Pavlov. (The latter, however, recanted his Anarcho-Syndicalist views under the pressure of the GPU, this being the price paid by him for his liberty. Pavlov made the statement disavowing his Anarchist views on release from prison). A contributing factor to the persistence of Anarcho-Syndicalist influence in the Bakers’ Union was the work of the Maximalists, Niushenkov and Kamyshev.

At the Second All-Russian Convention, the Bakers’ Union delegation contained a “Federalist” faction numbering ten to fifteen people, whose following extended to nearly a third of the union membership. At that convention, the first attempt was made (Maximoff, Niushenkov, Pavlov) to organise an underground revolutionary Federation of Food Workers. This was to be the first step

towards organising a Russian General Confederation of Labour. The move was to have been a genuine attempt by the Executive Committee of Russian Anarcho-Syndicalists to carry out the basic points of its programme. In view of the repressions which soon began, the committee of the above-mentioned comrades, elected at the meeting of the faction of the convention, did not even get a chance to start its work, as planned at the meeting. This was the last vivid manifestation of the struggle waged by Anarcho-Syndicalism within the Communist State-controlled trade union

Centralisation and terror

The programme of the Russian trade union movement was as follows: centralisation, compulsory membership, compulsory discipline imposed by disciplinary courts, the tutelage of the political party (the Communist Party in this case), militarisation of labour, compulsory labour service, labour armies, the attachment of workers to their places of work, nationalisation of production individual management (instead of collective administration) graduated wage scales (36 categories), introduction of sweatshop system, Taylorism, piecework, bonuses, premium systems, etc. Workers control and workers' management were proscribed and unconditional support of the government was demanded.

The policy and programme of the trade unions was wholly determined (and still is) by the policies and programme of the "Communist Government". At present, and this has been true for a number of years, the unions, or rather their administrative centres, have nothing in common with the proletarian masses. They only mirror the policy of the government, fulfilling all its demands at the expense of the working class.

The Soviet State has kept up its terroristic methods in suppressing all opposition within unions, meting out brutal punishment to anyone violating government decrees, which are inimical to the workers. In this respect the unions proved to be one of the many government repressive agencies, working in close collaboration with the other punitive organs of the State: the Che-Ka, People's Courts, the GPU, etc.

The following is an apt illustration of this terrorist policy towards workers. Krasny Nobat and Uralsky Rabochy reported the following cases: for taking an unauthorised three-day leave from his factory, one of the workers was sentenced to unload 5,000 pounds (801 tons), during ten days. All that to be done after his regular workday. Many other workers were sentenced to compulsory prison work for the same "crime" of absenting themselves during work. This slave holding policy flourished, especially in the Ural region, during the administration of Trotsky and Piatakov.

A government inspection of the sanitary and technical conditions prevailing in the Central Coal District revealed a ghastly picture, by which even the most frightful capitalist exploitation pales in comparison. In the name of the "commonwealth", that is the benefit of the State, workers had to live miles away from the mines in ramshackle barracks built of thin boards, and lacking elementary conveniences, where even doors and windows had fallen into disuse. In the winter the barracks gave hardly any protection against frosts and icy winds. There were no toilets, workers being compelled to use cesspools surrounding the barracks.

Mineworkers were getting half-a-pound of bread a day — on condition that they fulfilled their daily work norm. Failing that, they were deprived of this ration. In addition, overtime was exacted from the workers, who were paid for it with one meal a day. Workers who did not fulfill their norm were kept in the mine until they completed their daily task. And this leaves out the account of the flagrant tyranny and high-handed actions characterising the attitude of the administration to the workers. (This data is taken from the unpublished report of the doctors who were carrying

out this investigation. The report is kept among the materials of the Department of Safeguarding Labour, at the Labour Commissariat.)

Such conditions were especially prevalent in the life of the Ural workers during the administration of Trotsky and Piatakov. At the Izhevsk plant, for instance, an anarchist worker named Gordeyev was shot for failing to submit to work discipline (see *Golos Rossiya* for the first half of 1922, Berlin). In Ekaterinburg (now Sverdlovsk) workers of the mint were sentenced to hard prison labour, their “crime” being “violation of labour discipline”.

What was the Anarcho-Syndicalist programme, as opposed to that of the government-controlled “communist unions”? Briefly, it was that the State — even the so-called benevolent State — is the enemy of the working class. It follows, therefore, that the first task of the trade unions should be to emancipate themselves from State captivity, to emphasise the significance of industrial organization. In accordance with this premise the Anarcho-Syndicalists built their programme and tactics in the Russian trade union movement.

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Gregory Petrovich Maximoff
Syndicalists in the Russian Revolution
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